



Canadian Archaeological Association
Association Canadienne d'Archéologie

Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington St.
Ottawa K1A 0A2

November 29, 2012

Dear Prime Minister Harper,

We at the Canadian Archaeological Association are writing to express our concern about your government's position towards the collective heritage of Canadians, and indeed the collective heritage of humanity. Your government seems determined to undermine the abilities of Canadians and the institutions that we have created, to learn about, honour, and cherish the history of the land that we share and the people who have tread here since time immemorial.

Following the devastating cuts to Parks Canada in bill C-38 our voices joined those of at least 18 other international organizations decrying the crippling of the federal archaeology program. Those statements can be read on our website: <http://canadianarchaeology.com/caa/draconian-cuts-parks-canada>. There are a number of issues facing our organization that are imperiled by the current government's mandate. For example, the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada recently withdrew funding from the program that allowed us to provide travel awards for students presenting conferences at our annual meetings.

Today, our membership's concerns about the recent changes in the name and mandate of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, soon to be the Canadian Museum of History, have prompted us to write. We are pleased that the Federal Government has expressed a renewed interest in Canadian history and have committed \$25 million dollars to renewed programming at Canada's flagship museum. We also recognize that the upcoming bicentennial of confederation should be celebrated. We are concerned, however, that the new mandate places a disproportionate emphasis on Canadian history after confederation at the expense of the human history and our cultural achievements as a whole, and particularly those of the peoples who have occupied these lands since time immemorial.

We are concerned by a number of specific changes in the Museums Act: First, that the purpose of the Canadian Museum of History to "...enhance Canadians' knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of events, experiences, people and objects that reflect and have shaped Canada's history and identity, and also to enhance their awareness of world history and cultures" represents a significant narrowing of the mandate of the Canadian Museum of Civilization as outlined in the current Museums Act. Currently that purpose is "...to increase, throughout Canada and internationally, interest in, knowledge and critical understanding of and appreciation and respect for human cultural achievements and human behavior by establishing, maintaining and developing for research and posterity a collection of objects of historical or cultural interest, with special but not exclusive reference to Canada, and by demonstrating those achievements and behaviour, the knowledge derived from them and the understanding they represent."

Further, the omission of the terms “research, posterity, and collection” do not seem to reflect the museum’s long-standing and much-lauded focus on research and collections. This we find most troublesome.

We have the utmost confidence in our colleagues within the Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation and their professional credentials which reflect lives spent in knowing, conserving, and presenting information about our collective heritage. It is our hope that these curators, exhibit designers, and research professionals at the Canadian Museum of History will retain the autonomy to present narratives which are inclusive, balanced, and historically accurate and to increase the CMC’s collections which represent a vast resource to researchers who regularly work at the museum. The recent abolishment of the position of Vice-President for research and collections and the merging of research and exhibitions division at the CMC/CMH also gives us cause for concern. The CMC is valuable to Canadians not only for its exhibition about and celebrations of Canada’s past, but also as a *producer* of knowledge about that past.

For decades, Canada was a leader in human rights, progressive policies, social justice, environmental stewardship, and an advocate for the protection of natural and cultural heritage. This is no longer the case. Anthropology and archaeology are social sciences. It has become increasingly clear that this government believes that science which does not serve corporate interests will not be supported in this country.

The objectives of the Canadian Archaeological Association can be read here: <http://www.canadianarchaeology.com/caa/about>. You will see that it includes “promoting activities advantageous to archaeology and discouraging activities detrimental to archaeology” as well as serving as “an advocate in forums and the national scene.”

We are afraid that the proposed changes at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, now the Canadian Museum of History, reflects a new use of history to support the governments political agenda. The history and prehistory of this magnificent country should not be a political plaything.

Yours truly



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